Mind the Gap: A Critical Analysis of School Ethnography

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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by
Melissa Mahan

The Ohio State University
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Project Advisor: Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, Department of Anthropology

Abstract

School ethnography is a relatively young form of scientific inquiry, originally designed to solve social problems in the late twentieth century. As such, there are a series of prevailing issues that plague its use. This analysis searches to pinpoint what these issues are, how they contribute to knowledge gaps in school ethnographies, and the problems of interpretation and application that can arise from them. Past ethnographic work and existing critiques can be used to identify the most glaring issues, and more recent ethnographies still demonstrate some of those issues first identified decades ago. Finally, this paper will conclude with a series of potential solutions that would help to alleviate some of these knowledge gaps and move forward as a discipline.

Introduction

Education has always sought to prepare young people for life, but the goals it sets for what skills they will need varies across time and communities (Ogbu, 1981). Dr. Shirley Jackson, President of the Rensselaer Institute, identifies education as preparation for the economy (Jackson, 2007). This idea of education as a market tool is not unique; while Jackson was still in primary school, John Ogbu formulated the cultural-ecological theory, which assumed that formal schools are designed to provide skills for jobs (1981). This is owing to the fact that, while it is not a perfect measure, the amount of education a child will receive can generally predict their economic outcome (Ogbu, 1981). Owing to a desire to see more students receive education credentials and therefore improve their economic prospects, a panel of influential individuals in education met in 2007 to discuss how to better prepare students for jobs and life (Spellings, 2007). Some of the desired skillsets are learned through socialization rather than daily lessons, but are nonetheless important (Otto, 1985). Beyond textbooks and spelling tests, schools are the medium through which young children are trained in how to behave oneself in society (Spindler

and Spindler, 1985). This socialization process—which can take place on the playground, during story time, or any other situation where students learn subtle cues about what is acceptable—is cultural communication; after all, "Education *is* communication," states Jean Schensul firmly (Schensul, 1984).

Failure in a formal school setting can stem from a variety of factors, one of these being inadequate communication in the classroom (Maxwell, 1985). This is likely to occur when people of different communication styles have no translation matrix, such as when teachers and students from different cultures are put in the same classroom with no explanation about how their styles may differ (Ogbu, 1981). The idea of this mismatch hinges on those subtle socialization processes—like on the playground or during story time—and predicates that students and teachers from different cultures are taught to interact in different formats (Ogbu, 1981). Because the training system for teachers centers the communication styles associated with white, middle-class Americans, minority students are often tasked with this hurdle (Ogbu, 1981). This is problematic for the school system as a whole because if school is the way in which citizens are prepared for the economy, a failure to prepare any number of students is detrimental to that economy (Jackson, 2007). Currently, there is a high level of demand for high-skill workers, but not a commensurate number of young people in vocational schools (Jackson, 2007; Krupnick, 2017). Practices that do not factor in a student's background are potentially responsible for the United States' struggle to compete in STEM fields, as more than half of the population are either women or people of color; this failure to engage and prepare such a large percentage of academic talent can only serve to harm American strength in the global economy (Hockfield, 2007).

When discussing student failure and success, administrators typically refer to groups of students in relation to the "achievement gap." Attempts to correct the achievement gap—the notable difference between equally talented and intelligent students from different backgrounds—have frequently focused on understanding student placement and teacher capability through standardized testing, such as No Child Left Behind policies (Spellings, 2007). However, such benchmarks have often neglected to account for the needs of local economies and community-based markers of success (Maxwell, 1985). As a result, schools that reach for more funding must sometimes prove their success at the cost of accurately preparing students for a future in their local economy (Jackson, 2007). This is evident in high-skill industries, which often require training at a vocational school or the equivalent of an associate's degree; high schools that send students to four-year institutions receive a greater amount of funding, even if those students drop out within a semester or never utilize their degree (Department of Education, 2018; CTE Statistics, 2018). In comparison, a high school that sends students into the workforce with a certification from vocational or two-year institutions are perceived as "failing," even if the student finds immediate employment and is financially solvent (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018).

Testing, although it was designed only to chart student growth, can also be detrimental to individual students because it cannot be done without an obvious judgment of student worth (Sexton, 2007). This can inhibit all children, but particularly those most susceptible to believing that their worth as a human being is correlated to success—or failure—in the classroom (*Brown v. Board*, 1954). Put succinctly in the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) case ruling, "A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn."

Ethnographers seek to categorize what is taught and learned through any culture between people, as anthropologists are trained to see culture as a dialogue of people influencing each other rather than a strict lesson plan of unchanging requirements (Spindler and Spindler, 1985). Cultural transmission is not always formal; forms of humor, the tone of voice used to discuss a topic, and infractions for violating social norms are all indicators of underlying belief systems and are ways in which culture is perpetuated (Maxwell, 1985). When applied to the school system, this means that ethnographers must focus on the "hidden curriculum" of roles, expectations, and norms that children learn through socialization in schooling (Otto, 1985). This hidden curriculum will reveal the undercurrent of a student's daily life.

When an ethnographer enters a classroom to begin a study, they bring with them an anthropological perspective; this training encourages the researcher to conduct a holistic study in order to discover the social environment and therefore explain possible reasons for school failure outside of raw intelligence (Schensul, 1984). With properly applied ethnography, educators will be able to approach solutions with a more complete understanding of their nuanced environment (Otto, 1985). In short, ethnography gives clarity to a complex process (Otto, 1985).

Problems with School Ethnography

Because the study of schools is often a cross between emic and etic perspectives, school ethnography is a step apart from traditional ethnography; a holistic ethnography will examine more than a single element in any culture and draw connections between aspects of the culture, but this is not universal in school ethnographies (Ogbu, 1981). When an ethnographer fails to conduct a holistic study, it can skew the data and subsequently, interpretation of the results. However, it is not in an anthropologist's training to intentionally fail to be holistic; this failure is often the result of extraneous circumstances. School ethnography is riddled with problems, but

these begin in the fact that school ethnography is still in developmental stages (Ogbu, 1981). The youth of the discipline has led to issues in the standard of reporting, failure to conduct research outside of direct application, and a methodology that does not account for macro-social factors. Because so much of the discipline is nonstandard, funding sources can be tricky to find, and there are discrepancies about what the appropriate amount of time or depth research is to be conducted (Schensul et al., 1985). All of these issues can contribute to knowledge gaps in a study, which will then garner skewed interpretations.

School ethnography, in terms of theory, peaked in the 1980s. Both prior and after, there is comparatively little addition to theory; while the entire discipline is roughly 40 years old, its start-and-stop nature means that it has not been growing for its entire lifespan. For comparison, anthropology as a whole has roots going back nearly 100 years. Due to the infancy of school ethnography, there exists no standard of rigor for reporting; while a study may be conducted from either an emic or etic perspective, there is no universal anthropological definition for school terms that an ethnographer can use, yet also there is no descriptive standard for which terms are to be defined for the audience to ensure that all people can interpret the work in the same way regardless of how the study was conducted (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). Ogbu (1981) defines this as a conceptual issue: what constitutes “school” varies between cultures, and this can extend to subcultures of socioeconomic class or local communities. This flexibility of meaning can include any word in school vernacular; the culture of any given school will have its own set of connotations and slang, formed by its environment, population, and history (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). Even though the ethnographer might attempt to use culturally neutral terms in order to minimize this effect, language is inherently full of connotations; a failure to define key pieces of study can lead to a misinterpretation by the audience (Maxwell, 1985). This misinterpretation is

doubly problematic because the audience frequently includes educators with limited or no ethnographic experience (Watson-Gegeo, 1988; Schensul, 1984).

Anthropology as a discipline varies in its goals: for some anthropologists, application is a natural and necessary end for investigation, while for others the knowledge gained is its own end. School ethnography as a subfield of anthropology, and perhaps ethnography in general, was not generated with this same flexibility: it was borne from a desire to mend social problems, and studies are thus almost exclusively done for applied anthropology (Ogbu, 1981). School administrators realized that until they knew the needs and desires of the student, they were forced to rely on their intuition (Maxwell, 1985). The direct result of this is that schools are not studied until there is a problem to be fixed: successful versions of the school can only be studied via nostalgia, as in Tim Hallett's 2010 ethnography of Costen Elementary School. Ethnographers struggle with this limited window of study particularly when they try to understand the history of school policies and administrators, as history can color the way new or refurbished ideas are received (Hallett, 2010). In some ways, this process of studying memory is inherent to ethnography as part of the soft sciences—cultures and subcultures are constantly changing, so studying the memories of a people will always yield different results from an ongoing observation. Understanding history as it happens is most valuable, however, because even when an ethnographer is able to find knowledgeable, talkative informants, their study is limited to the informants' memories and prejudices and may not include information the researcher finds relevant.

School ethnography assumes that problems that occur in the school can be solved in the school (Ogbu, 1981). These studies are often conducted through "microethnography," in which the anthropologist will focus closely on a single perceived problem, usually with the intent of

remedying the individual issue without making significant change to the established system (Ogbu, 1981). Microethnography is termed such because it stands in contrast to the classic definition of ethnography, an in-depth study that investigates multiple or all aspects of a society and the ways in which they work together to form a cohesive culture. Microethnography is popular because researchers tend to begin their study with the assumption that all people have the same general school experience as the researcher, and that they are therefore akin to an expert about the general school experience. While this at first seems common sense, it ignores broader macro-social influences that affect actors within the school environment: a researcher might assume that students who are inattentive are this way because either they are lazy or the teacher has failed to engage them—these were, after all, the only reasons that particular researcher would have dozed off in class. This ignores a third possibility of a larger issue: a student whose parents must work through the night—and who therefore spends the entire night taking care of their baby sister—will be inattentive no matter how engaging and well-planned the lesson. The limited scope of the study extends its shortfalls to the solutions proposed, and the result is that systemic changes, such as providing free childcare for families with young children, are not even discussed in this context (Ogbu, 1981). Microethnography can even be so limited as to ignore the culture of the school outside of a single classroom (Ogbu, 1981). Who a microethnographer speaks with can be problematic because they are likely to select the most relevant actors to the interaction they seek to explain, but this means that they have a strong chance of forgetting to include all of the "invisible" actors that influence the school setting; there are no pastors, parents, or soccer coaches in the classroom on any given day, but each of these people are still able to have a direct effect on the way a student internalizes information and builds their worldview (Ogbu, 1981). Researchers who conduct microethnography do so in an

attempt to gain a full understanding of a single aspect of the school because a full understanding of the school in its entirety is impossible for a single person; but this comes at the cost of understanding the school as a system with interconnected pieces, and can bar the researcher from being able to see very relevant data.

There are further issues in the actual process of school ethnography. Data collection, like data reporting, is still a nonstandard process. Although they are not the same, qualitative and naturalistic studies are sometimes termed "ethnography" simply because they so frequently overlap (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). When interviewing informants, ethnographers have a tendency to ask only transactional questions without supporting structural ones; this leaves data regarding the structure of the school open to the researcher's assumptions—assumptions that are only even possibly valid if the researcher's experience in school was strikingly similar to students currently in classes (Ogbu, 1981). Because informants are used to describe the makeup of the school as a whole, research that treats random sampling as a purer form of science has a stronger possibility of being skewed; rather, ethnographers must choose individuals who are representative of the group in order to gain the proper perspective (Otto, 1985). Continually leaving knowledge gaps in any realm is more problematic for some researchers than others, as Ogbu (1981) notes that some ethnographers are prone to becoming disillusioned with the educational system and their results show clear bias.

The decision to conduct a school ethnography does not always stem from pure curiosity. Research is expensive, and ethnographers who conduct a long-term study are likely to get their funding from the school; this can directly, and indirectly, affect the results of the ethnography (Ogbu, 1981). When research funding comes from the administration, school officials are able to exert pressure on the researcher to seek applied rather than basic ethnography, to investigate an

area that the researcher believes to be irrelevant, and to provide solutions that are in line with existing values and practices rather than suggest any form of disruption (Ogbu, 1981). Further, limited funding can prompt ethnographers to engage in "blitzkrieg ethnography," in which the researcher enters the school for very limited amounts of time and quickly draws their conclusions (Rist, 1980). Blitzkrieg ethnography is similar to microethnography in that both rely on a limited scope of actual research, leaving many pieces open to the researcher's interpretation. Unstable funding can lead to both of these practices, as some ethnographers find it tempting to begin drawing conclusions before the research period has completed (Ogbu, 1981).

The results and application of school ethnography can be both supported and limited by theoretical frameworks, which encourage ethnographers to focus most closely on specific situations (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). Researchers are often trained in similar fields, and these theoretical frameworks may be common to more than a few. Because researchers often share a theoretical background, they are likely to interpret results in a similar manner to one another (Ogbu, 1981). When conducting an ethnography, researchers often shy away from checklists, meaning that each study is subject to the whims and biases of the individual ethnographer's training and attention span—and again, their assumptions about what school is and how it operates (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). This has the potential to stagnate innovation about both design and application of school ethnography (Ogbu, 1981). This fault is evident in the idea of cultural mismatch, which supposes that minority students do poorly in school as a result of communication styles that differ between themselves and their teachers (Ogbu, 1981). The perceived appropriate solution would be to replace Anglo teachers with ethnically relevant teachers, but there is little evidence to show that this decision has been successful (Ogbu, 1981). Whatever the reason, simply replacing one teacher with another did not work; the data was

somehow insufficient, even though it fully described cultural mismatch as a framework. Despite the fact that this misapplication demonstrated one way that strict theoretical frameworks can be inhibitive, not all ethnographers believe in conducting an ethnography absent them (Erickson, 1984). Watson-Gegeo (1988) noted that one way to overcome this issue would be to chart the structure of the school and participant interactions on a more abstract scale when attempting to apply theories, as a greater degree of abstraction allows the researcher to think more broadly about the implications of their observations.

Critical Proof

Old Order Mennonite One-Room School: A Case Study (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989)

While Old Order Mennonite communities exist within walking distance of secular American communities, the differences in values, beliefs, and education systems are strikingly different. Notably, the integration of community with education is so intense that the two are, in some ways, inseparable (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). This integration speaks to the problem of school ethnographies discerning between school and community cultures: in seeing a setup in which the two are very alike, it is easier to distinguish minute differences between the two ecosystems in more separated secular schools. Although the study was conducted in the late 1980s, the Old Order belief in tradition as a virtue gives ethnography about Old Order structures a long shelf life.

Dewalt and Troxell (1989) worked together to collect data for 6 months, ending in January 1988. Although the study itself was done for a short period of time, the Dewalt and Troxell noted that they were able to speak with the teacher, several parents and students, and the local bishop for interviews. Researchers even included some of the “invisible” actors, such as the superintendent of the local public (secular) schools and others who had contact but not intimate

interaction with the Mennonite school (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). The speed with which the study was conducted was in part possible because one of the researchers had been engaging with the Old Order community for over a decade (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). The study's methodology was rigorous in that the researchers were able to frequently discuss their interpretations of informants' answers, which enabled Dewalt and Troxell to provide a reliable account of their data. Whether the data is accurate, however, is a separate question; the ethnographers do not doubt their results, despite the fact that in small, deeply integrated communities such as those of the Old Order Mennonites, distancing oneself from the community in any fashion could mean total upheaval of one's life (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). If the teacher were to express a strong dislike of the prescribed teaching methods or curriculum, the community's preeminent emphasis on tradition could mean social sanctions (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). Thus, while Dewalt and Troxell were able to confer with their informants on many occasions to discuss each person's answers, readers must note that the answers for some informants may have had social pressures attached.

The Old Order school takes pride in its ability to design its own curriculum according to the needs of the community (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). Mennonites believe that a successful student is an obedient one, who learns by observation the norms of the classroom regarding instruction (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). Further, a successful student would learn teamwork and bond with the community at large to develop a group identity rather than an individual one (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). Because of this, students receive multiple recesses every day to play with one another (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). Texts used in the curriculum are crafted specifically to indoctrinate pupils with community values such as hard work and religious faith, and students are graded on their ability to answer tests factually rather than provide analysis

(Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). In contrast to standardized testing in the public school system, Mennonite schools consider the social development of young people to be more important than their academic development. This is important to note because Dewalt and Troxell's (1989) analysis of community values gives rise to this conclusion, underscoring the need for an ethnographer to understand local values and belief systems when evaluating what education is meant to accomplish.

An examination of the curriculum and structure of Old Order Mennonite schools is useful to understand the integration of school and community, and can serve as a contrast for secular schools. Mennonite schools prepare students for community life through strict social norms, and the curriculum demonstrates a commitment to maintaining community isolation by eschewing any mention of modern media or areligious scientific theories (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989). The setup of the school is such that children learn how classes are conducted through observation of older students and mirroring their actions. Repetition of classroom life is evident in that researchers estimate that less than 5% of class time was used for giving instructions, and only 35% of the entire day is used by the teacher for statements of any kind; in contrast to prior studies from secular schools that claim nearly three fourths of class time is consumed with the teacher speaking.

Dewalt and Troxell's (1989) inclusion of the school curriculum and standards of success are valuable to the ethnography in that they serve to form a holistic picture of Mennonite school life. Because of the limited number of students, community members, and administration, as well as the strong emphasis Old Order Mennonites place on group conformity, the researchers were able to choose a representative sample of informants. The strong integration between Mennonite adult society and expectations of schoolchildren's learning enabled Dewalt and Troxell (1989) to

demonstrate what a school with absolutely no cultural mismatch would look like. Finally, while the standards of what constitutes a "successful" academic career are different, the researchers were able to demonstrate the idea proposed by Jackson, that the point of education is to prepare students for the economy: Mennonite students are prepared for their own, insulated, economy (Dewalt and Troxell, 1989; Jackson, 2007).

Although the study had great strengths in describing the setting and local practices, descriptions of connotations were not always explicitly included. This is evident in that the researchers raise questions in their closing statements about the children's perception of whether all instruction is to be regarded as education (including any given in religious services or at home) or if only that which occurs in the schoolhouse qualifies. Reading is described both as a task and as a form of entertainment and pleasure; Dewalt and Troxell (1989) mention that reading represents a rest from physical labor but do not discuss whether students include reading in the same category as social activities and physical play, or if it is more strongly associated with schoolwork and religious studies.

Second Culture Acquisition: Ethnography in the Foreign Language Classroom (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996)

One of the most enduring problems school ethnography appears to have had is with the integration of macro-level culture and the classroom as a microcosm. Macro-level culture would be difficult to escape in a language class, as part of the curriculum entails studying the ways in which different cultures interact and how language frames those interactions. Additionally, teachers must be clear about the connotations of the terms they use, because cross-cultural translation can result in offensive or comical word choices. Language classrooms are therefore a

near-ideal candidate for analysis of the ways macro-culture and education processes are intertwined.

Interestingly, language and culture are not universally taught together; although language is dependent on the local dialect for daily use, the structure of a language can be taught in an academic setting that allows students to distance themselves from cultural actors who use and create language (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). This is done by standardizing the language and creating a vocabulary free from slang and idioms, and teaching language not as a process, formed by a history of trade and colonization; but rather as a tool, dry and translatable.

To study acculturation in a foreign language classroom, Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) conducted written ethnographic interviews via email in the fall of 1991 with approximately two dozen university students in a Spanish class. While this suited the researchers' timeline and goals of the study, it did not create a holistic picture of the foreign language classroom. The ethnographers were limited to what students chose to reveal about their experiences, rather than being able to watch minute but relevant interactions unfold in real time. Additionally, the limited time frame of the study—given that it was done only once (with one follow-up), rather than as a continuous longitudinal study—creates further issues in the idea of holism, as any number of macro-cultural factors could color the experiences students have in a given year (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). The researchers conducted a microethnography, a popular format (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996).

Like many school ethnographies, Robinson-Stuart and Nocon's (1996) investigation was done for application; that is to say, the researchers had a specific problem and evaluated whether their particular criteria could solve it. The study itself focused on the effectiveness of cultural training assignments, which included interviewing native Spanish speakers and learning about

the native speaker's culture (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). The goal of these assignments was to foster a greater sensitivity toward cultural differences and give the students an example of using Spanish in everyday life (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). The theory behind the creation of this process of acculturation by interaction drew their inspiration from previous studies regarding language and cultural understanding—more specifically, the lack thereof (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). While the researchers note the prior studies, they do not discuss the ways in which the cultures of those schools are similar or different from their chosen university (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). Because the assignments had the intent of minimizing xenophobia and increasing students' desire to study Spanish as a cultural transmission agent, it would be highly relevant for the researchers to include a description of the local politics regarding linguistic imperialism and attitudes toward multiculturalism and diversity, as well as any other seminars or classes a student could choose to take that would have compounded the effect.

Unlike participant observation, the interview format described by the researchers subtly shapes how responders were meant to use terms, rather than allowing informants to describe their own definitions (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). For example, one of the questions (and its corresponding sample response) uses the term "American culture" (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). This is important to note, because the wording of the question implicitly directed students to think of culture as a broad, nationwide phenomenon, rather than a local, community-specific one. Sometimes, this subtle instruction can be used to understand students' biases and associations; another question that asks about "Spanish-speaking people" garners a result about "Mexicans" (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). The issue Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) faced in both design and reporting stem from the common problem of school ethnographers

failing to define their terms. It is easy to remember the importance of careful description when a word has no easy translation between languages, but much harder to be exacting when both researcher and informant assume their interpretation of semantics is the standard one (Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996).

The Myth Incarnate: Recoupling Processes, Turmoil, and Inhabited Institutions in an Urban Elementary School (Hallett, 2010)

Although the majority of educational institutions in the United States are not minority-based, such as ESL classes or Mennonite schoolhouses, there is a disproportionate number of publicly available ethnographies that center on "othered" institutions. Hallett's (2007) study of Costen Elementary School, however, is an example of what he describes as a standard, urban Midwestern school when national policy was on the cusp of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the practices of which left profound and lasting impacts on American education. *The Myth Incarnate* is a paper based on Hallett's original 2007 ethnography, *The Leadership Struggle: The Case of Costen Elementary School.* The two are nearly identical, except that *The Myth Incarnate* includes more thoroughly developed ideas and *The Leadership Struggle* features more raw data. Because they were written regarding the same case study, both will be referenced in this analysis.

Costen Elementary School is a fictitious name for a real school in the Midwest, which Hallett (2007) studied for just under two years, ending in summer 2001. He began his fieldwork soon after a new principal, Mrs. Kox, was hired for the school; he was therefore present for significant administrative changes implemented with the same idea behind NCLB policies: accountability. Originally a business term, accountability is the idea that educators must prove their merit by demonstrating student success, typically done through standardized testing. Accountability as a functional method relies on the assumption that the only significant

difference between successful and unsuccessful teachers is personal talent or work ethic, and that any other factor (e.g. funding, support from the community, undiagnosed learning disabilities, dialect barriers) is irrelevant to performance. That Costen's school council held this assumption is evident, as Hallet notes that benchmarks for student success were not tailored to individual classes or grade levels, but rather to the entire school district. The accountability policies also did not account for students' personal struggles, despite the fact that Hallett (2010) notes that nearly half of the students in the school spoke limited English and more than three-fourths were in low-income households. Accountability policies caused a cultural shift among staff in Costen, during which teachers became less trusting of the administration (Hallett, 2007).

Because Hallett (2010) entered Costen after Kox had been principal for several months, he could only establish a basis of what the prior structure of the school looked like through interviews with teachers. Hallett's (2010) interviews included teachers, local school council members, and administrators employed by the school at that time. Hallett's study notably did not include interviews with students, past principals, or teachers. This is important because the only informants he had were directly impacted by—and therefore held clear convictions either for or against—the changing policies; there were no simple bystanders who could speak to the accuracy of the informants' memories or comment on potential biases.

The majority of Hallett's observations took place in either meetings or lunches. This method inadvertently lends itself to microethnography, as the majority of a teacher's day is not spent in the breakroom or meetings, and thus Hallett's observations of how teachers were impacted by policy changes is subject to each teacher's interpretation of how their day has changed. Hallett (2010) notes the limited nature with which he is able to observe the past: Hallett learned that one former principal left the school for a job with a company she had hired to design

Costen's curriculum and was therefore skating into potential ethics violations, despite teachers' accounts of a perfect administration prior to Kox.

The Myth Incarnate describes the social effect of surveillance practices but speaks very minimally to how this social effect could carry into classroom activities and results, noting only that standardized test scores lowered slightly after accountability policies were implemented; ostensibly, this change was the result of teachers feeling stressed over Kox's administration (Hallett, 2010). Additionally, Hallett (2007) studies and reports on Costen in a way that minimizes the relevance of macro-cultural events in teachers' lives. Both of these are problems with holism, as they fail to integrate larger norms and events into minute systems. There is no description about what in the community was happening when the test scores dipped—whether there had been a traumatic event that impacted learning at a group level such as a citywide fire the previous year that left scores of students homeless, or if life were continuing as normal for them; whether scores of teachers were dealing with their spouses losing jobs at a manufacturing plant, or if their stress could only stem from Kox's policies.

Hallett (2010) makes sure to define all terms related to his proposed theoretical framework and the official roles of teachers, administrators, and the local school council. Although he does not state specific measurements for student, teacher, or school success, he implies that the goal is to become competitive with a nearby school through standardized testing. These definitions are relevant in that subsequent school ethnographies are able to use Hallett's descriptions as a comparison for the way educator roles and curriculum targets shift over time.

In his conclusion, Hallett (2010) recommends that ethnography be used to ease transitions between accountability policies, but does not provide any substantive ideas about how his own study could be used to aid schools with cultures similar to Costen in their adjustment to

accountability and surveillance policies. In his ethnography of Costen, Hallett (2010) sought rather to understand the process of restructuring when such policies were introduced. *The Myth Incarnate* is a more thoroughly developed version of ideas Hallett first touched on during his initial ethnography, indicating that he did not draw his full conclusions until after he had completed his initial study. This is relevant in that school ethnography is frequently used only as applied anthropology, and a lack of understanding school processes as they apply to an individual institution can lead to a misapplication of the data; while there are problems in the reporting and format of Hallett's study, it overall is a step toward closing one knowledge gap.

Twitter as a Learning Community in Higher Education (Ricoy and Feliz, 2016)

Online education is no longer uncommon; indeed, it is sometimes the preferred method for students who have location, health, or career demands that would otherwise make education impossible. It is important to study online interactions because the setup of lessons and interaction could foster a culture distinct from traditional classrooms; education online may not have the same successes or failures as traditional formats.

Ricoy and Feliz (2016) sought to understand how an internet learning community demonstrates their engagement in a didactic process, using Twitter as their example. They chose to study a class from a distance learning institution, which ensured that students would not be engaging in their activities outside of Twitter. These activities consisted of discussions in which each member of the class was required to participate during the six-week course, which took place in June and July 2013 (Ricoy and Feliz, 2016). The institution, UNED, is in Spain; this presents a potential problem when applying theories of academic culture to American institutions, but this problem is mitigated by the fact that Twitter's platform remains the same across all cultures and etiquette would therefore be similar.

If school ethnography is still unstandardized due to its stall in developmental stages, internet education is even more so an infant. School ethnography is able to draw on practices in other disciplines for inspiration and guidance, but this is not so when discussing the use of social media in education (Ricoy and Feliz, 2016). The positive side to this lack of guidance is that researchers are careful to be absolutely clear in describing their methodology, which can help prevent the problem of misinterpretation by the audience due to a lack of definition. Ricoy and Feliz (2016) describe a multilevel approach to their study, using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

While the researchers make a clear attempt at being holistic, they fall victim to microethnography's tendency to evade macro-cultural integration. The ethnographers did not conduct a study on internet etiquette and slang across different social networking platforms, which could owe to the fact that not many exist. Digital ethnography is even younger than school ethnography, as computers and the internet were not readily accessible prior to recent decades.

Ricoy and Feliz (2016) were able to draw connections to patterned behavior, noting that students with low Twitter skills had a tendency to use "reply" rather than the assigned hashtags, similarly to how they had experienced email. Once students understood how to navigate the technicalities of the platform, researchers noted that they began to correct themselves and participate using the hashtags. The ethnographers note that a better understanding of the platform also correlated to a better classroom environment and rhetoric; applied to classrooms, this indicates that poorly defined social expectations in the classroom will have an immediate, negative effect on students (Ricoy and Feliz, 2016).

The researchers' choice to use Twitter was not fully explained, but did have a helpful by-product; unlike digital ethnography that allows for people to edit their responses, tweets cannot

be changed. Tweets can, however, be deleted; Ricoy and Feliz (2016) did not discuss whether their retrieval system, Hootsuite, retained deleted files.

Twitter as a Learning Community also notes that students did not frequently participate in class discussions late at night or over the weekends; although they were not physically in the classroom, regular work hours were still treated as the appropriate time to complete schoolwork (Ricoy and Feliz, 2016). Ricoy and Feliz (2016) note that throughout the course, the Twitter users demonstrated communication patterns that closely resemble those of students in traditional classrooms. However, the researchers neglect to comment on the influence of the students' educational and lifestyle backgrounds. This is important because the participants in the study were each seeking a master's degree, indicating that they were all born prior to 1991. Ricoy and Feliz (2016) further note that the participants were all new to Twitter and required sessions on how to use it rather than intuitively understanding the layout, indicating that their adolescence and earlier years of education were not marked by constant online socialization and classroom integration of online resources and platforms in the same way a child born in the age of iPhones might be. This investigation carries a clear bias toward the experience of millennial-aged people over that of older adults or younger teens and the results could not likely be applied equally to all age groups.

Summary of Analysis

It is important for anthropologists to be aware of what pieces of information are missing from any study—to know what the gaps are. Without an understanding of what is wrong, it is impossible to work towards improvement of a study or the discipline as a whole.

The most glaring knowledge gap that continually appears in ethnographies is a failure of reporting. Without a full understanding of the assumptions made by the researcher

and sociopolitical context of the school, it is impossible to truly know whether results can be trusted. It is entirely possible that each study evaluated in this paper conducted a fully holistic study, but did not report on everything because they felt that some aspects were not relevant or that the reader would make the same assumptions that the researcher had made.

Barring the idea that the details simply weren't reported, the most extensive problem appears to be that the researcher did not completely investigate the context of the school, if at all. With the exception of the Mennonite school, which had been undergoing study for over a decade, none of the school ethnographies analyzed here were conducted over much more than a year (Dewalt and Troxell, 1984; Hallett, 2007; Ricoy and Feliz, 2016; Robinson-Stuart and Nocon, 1996). The result of not investigating the context is that the study cannot be integrated into macro-level culture and its generalizability is highly suspect; the ethnographic assignments in Robinson-Stuart and Nocon's (1996) study were deemed successful, but they did not account for how intense xenophobia was in the area or if there were strong feelings that English was linguistically superior. For example, if the area studied was generally accepting of native Spanish speakers, a more xenophobic area might rebel against being forced to interact in a different language.

As formal schooling continues to evolve, ethnographers will have to watch trends in distance education, specifically internet-based schools. The internet classroom, increasingly popular, is not an exact match for the interactions that can be observed in a traditional classroom and future ethnographers should work to establish how the two forms differ. There may be an enduring knowledge gap in distance education for some time, simply because there is not yet a fully developed theory of internet culture and therefore the context for internet-based schools will be muddled.

None of the studies evaluated in this paper noted the source of their funding, despite the fact that multiple past ethnographers have been clear about the pressure that a funding source can put on an ethnographer to interpret the data they collect (Schensul et al., 1985).

Conclusion

Ethnographers who fail to report on all of their findings do not do so because they hope to mislead their audience or fellow scientists, but rather because they hope to be concise in a published work. With the dawn of the internet age, where access and storage of large amounts of material is cheaply—or even freely—available, this reduction should not be truly necessary. Rather than deleting bits of information deemed unimportant, anthropologists now have the option to publish an extended version of their work that includes field notes, a background on themselves to account for disciplined subjectivity, definitions of key terms thought to be "common sense" such as education or schooling, and more extensive description of the context of the school. In this way, readers can better understand whether a conclusion was drawn because all other options were ruled out, or if there is still room for spurious correlation.

Researchers should attempt to work towards a more comprehensive ethnographic method that could be applied to any school, so that the resultant theory of how the individual school—or schools in general—functions can be sounder. To be functional, this method would require a thorough investigation of demographics and school context, including a shared framework of how to approach different schools. Creating the framework would entail collaboration via definition; if an ethnographer reports on each of the details they investigated and how terms were defined across local cultures, other ethnographers have more data to work with as a comparison. This collaboration would also serve a second purpose: while school ethnographies have

continued to exist, the most substantial theory-building took place prior to 1990, and if any discipline is to advance, it requires constant analysis and new ideas.

Unstable funding can lead to shortened studies and precludes truly holistic ethnographies; if possible, a government source should be established to provide for longitudinal, in-depth studies. While education is typically left to individual states, it is also a national interest; a national source may better serve the whole, as national benchmarks for success are often hotly contested.

Ethnography lends itself well to understanding the needs of a school, but even more so to understanding how a school fits into a larger sociopolitical and economic context. Past attempts at school reform have focused on keeping the United States a competitor in the global economy, but this has sometimes come at the cost of local economies being unable to sustain their workforce. Future ethnographies should investigate how to evaluate "success" as it means to the local economy, as well as to the national and global economies to better prepare students for the whole market rather than all students competing in the same arena.

Although new, school ethnography shows promise in terms of its development and future application.

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